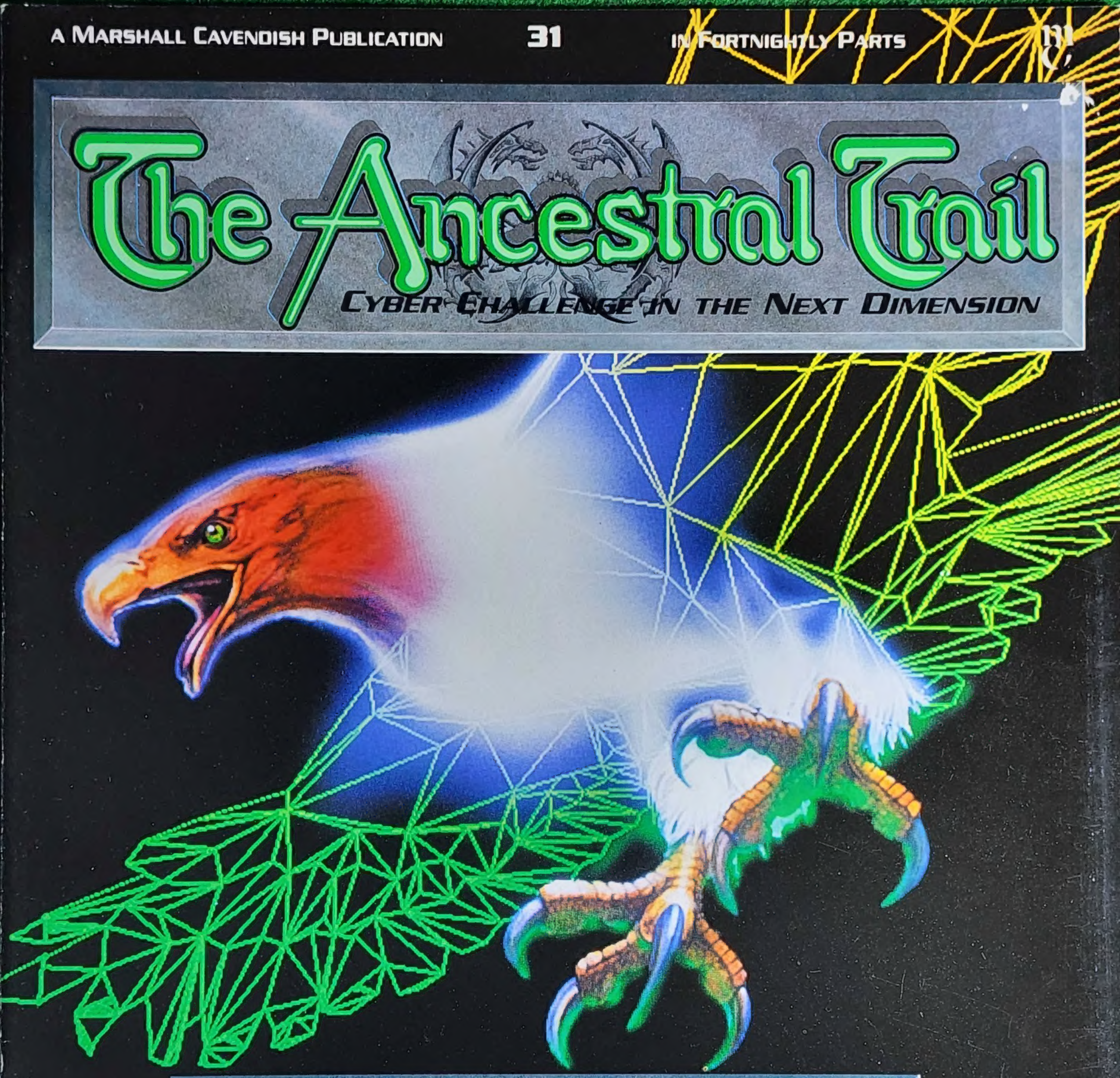
A Marshall Cavendish Publication 31 In Fortnightly Parts

The Ancestral Trail

Cyber Challenge in the Next Dimension



31 Holotron, Dynamic Deceiver

Battle of wits with a shape shifter

Juliet Heller

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In the thirty-first sector

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Acrid, black smoke filled the skies as Richard desperately clung on to Robo's safety harness. Beneath him, Richard could see a cauldron of fire spreading across the sandy terrain. The pungent odour of burning plastic hung heavy in the air.

Cocooned

Richard thought his ears would burst as an enormous explosion sent fragments of burning plastic careering upwards. He looked down in dismay. The melting plastic would be upon them in an instant.

"Robo – do something!" he yelled.

The familiar whirring sound from deep within his robotic companion told Richard that Robo was searching for a solution to their predicament. When it came, Richard could only look on in wonder.

Instead of being engulfed in molten plastic, Richard watched as the fragments were halted by an invisible shield. Soon, an oval shell that blotted out all light had formed around Richard and Robo.

"Have created temporary forcefield," explained Robo. "Molten plastic sand has solidified around forcefield to form brittle protective shell."

Breaking the Egg

Richard reached out to touch the thin membrane which separated Robo and himself from the torrent of burning plastic outside. At the same time, there was a gentle thud as Robo guided their unlikely sanctum to a safe landing spot. The intense explosions that raged on the other side of their protective shield gradually dwindled away. Soon, there was nothing but silence.

When Richard was satisfied that there would be no further explosions, he withdrew his sword and hacked away at the oval shell. Within moments, he had cut a hole big enough for the pair to clamber through.

"Let's take a look outside," he said.

Richard and Robo emerged into the charred relics of the plastic desert. Its crimson splendour had disappeared. Instead, there was a desolate wasteland.

Cracked sky

As Richard scanned the terrain, a noise from behind him caught his attention. "The cyber cruiser!" Richard yelled excitedly, turning to see the flying machine heading towards him. "Robo! I don't know how you do it!"

"Remote control," explained the robot.

Anxious to escape the aura of doom which surrounded them, Richard and Robo were soon soaring through the skies. They had not been flying for long when Richard noticed something strange appear in the distance.

Spinning towards him in a uniform pattern were hundreds of cube-shaped objects. They were on a direct collision course with the cyber cruiser.

"Cuboids – benign. Harmless." Robo's voice rang out as Richard frantically swerved the cyber cruiser left and right to avoid the spinning cubes.

"Sorry, Robo," Richard said, gritting his teeth. "I have to disagree – if one of those things hits the cruiser we're in trouble!"

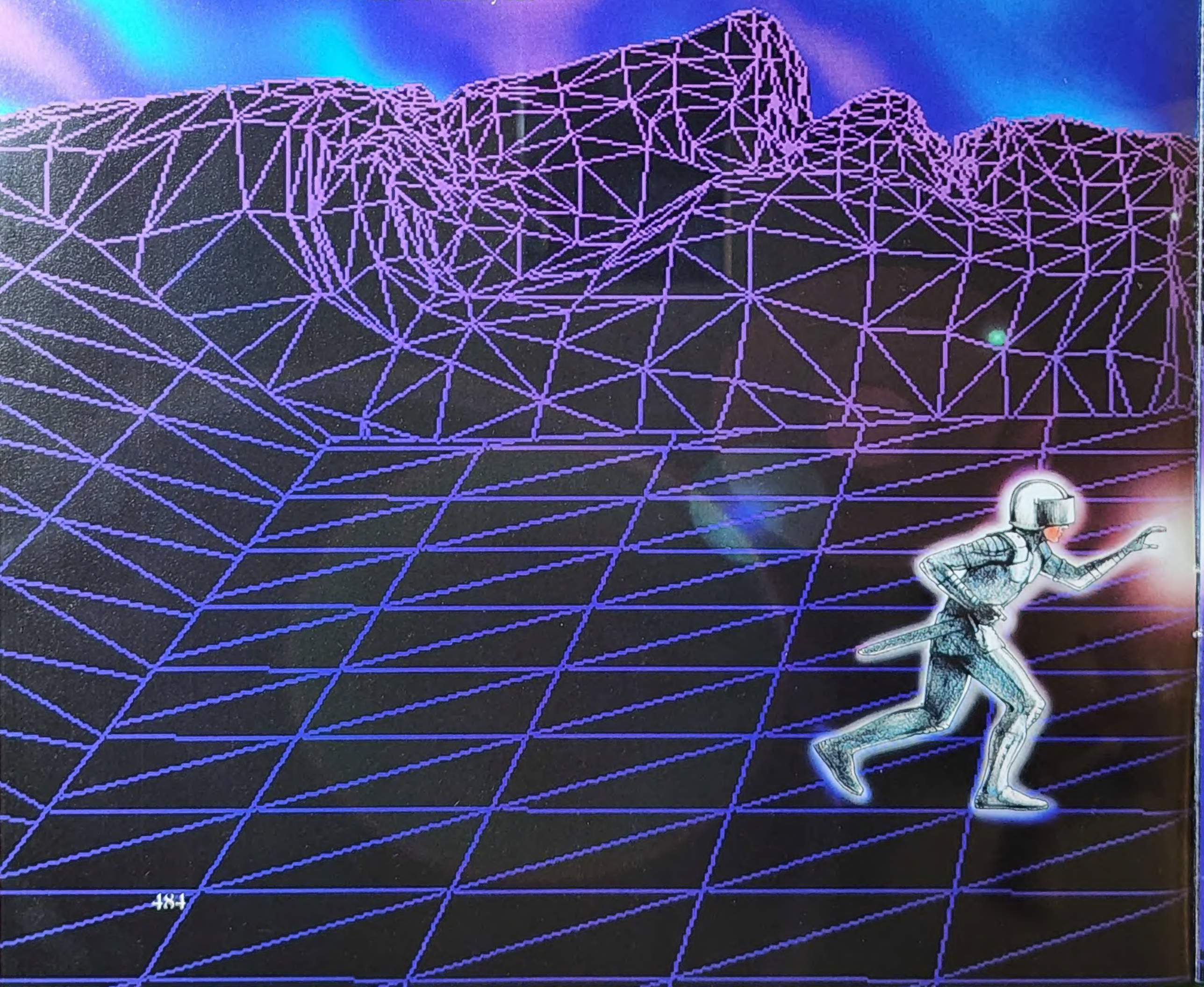
There was a brief pause before Robo reacted to this statement. "Diagnosis adjusted," he said. "Avoid cuboids."

VECTOR LAND

Suddenly, there was a sound of metal hitting metal. From the corner of his eye Richard could see what had happened. A cuboid had crashed into Robo, knocking the robot from the back of the cyber cruiser and into the midst of the objects.

Richard had no choice. There was nothing that he could do to help Robo. If he stayed up in the skies it would not be long before the flying machine was battered to a pulp by the cuboids. Adjusting the joystick controls, he pointed the cyber cruiser downwards and prepared to land.

There was a hiss of hydraulics and the flying machine came to rest. Richard looked around him and squinted his eyes in disbelief. He had landed on a hilly terrain, the like of which he had never



seen before. It appeared to be composed of brightly-lit neon grid lines.

Richard hardly had enough time to take in the awesome spectacle when something even stranger came into his line of vision.

Walking slowly towards him was a small humanoid figure, dressed in a manner that was extremely familiar to Richard.

The figure wore a body armour that was exactly the same as Richard's own. On its head was a protective visor. Hanging around its waist, Richard could see a sword. The newcomer moved directly in front of Richard and stood in silence.

Richard drew his sword as he was being scrutinized. He was surprised to see the figure before him do the same.

"Who are you?" Richard demanded.

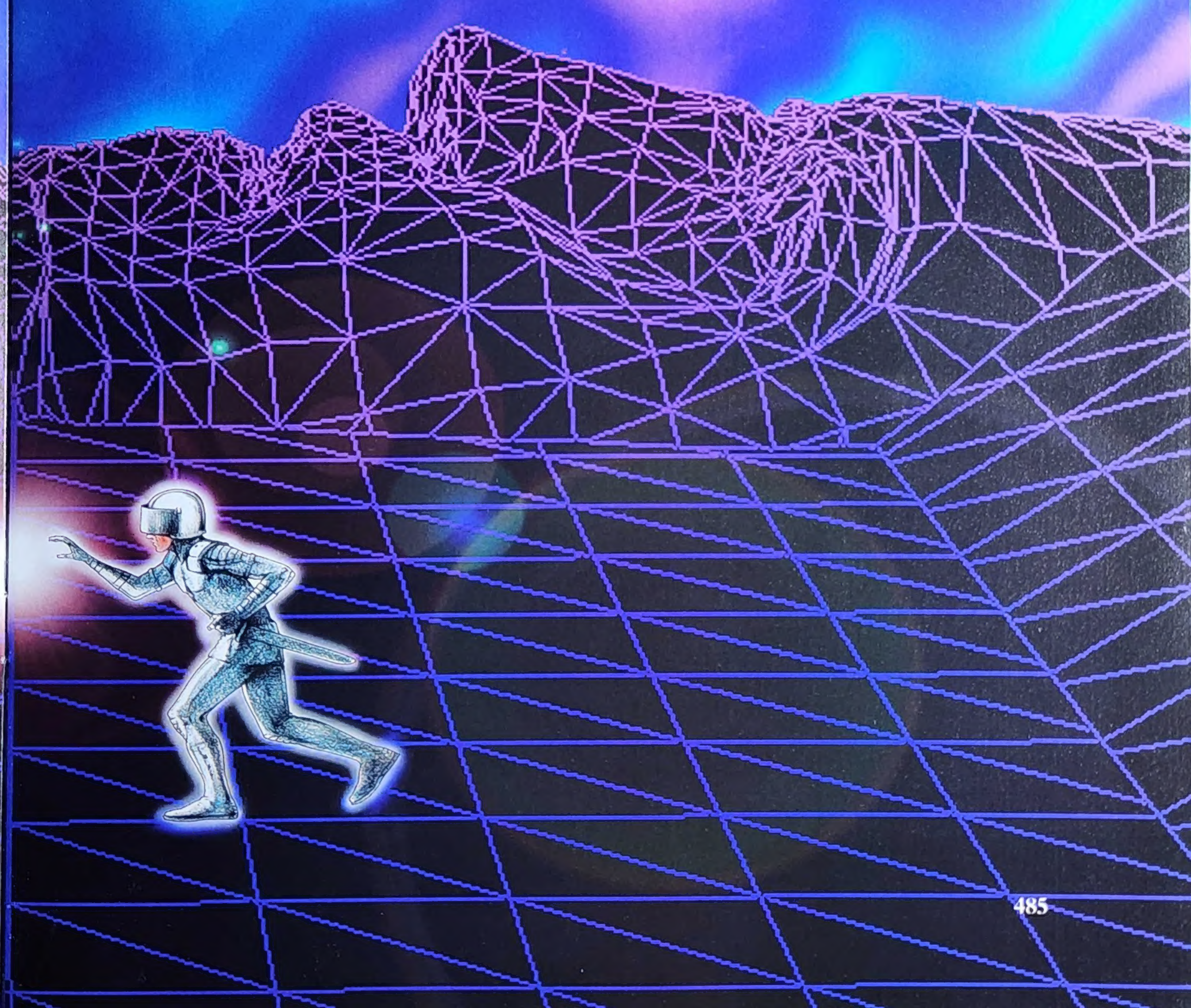
"I am Richard, the Chosen One," came the reply, in a voice which sounded identical to Richard's own.

Richard struggled to keep his calm, "Is this some kind of joke?" he said.

The imposter let out a laugh.

RICHARD'S ANGER

Richard's face reddened. This time the Cyber Dimension had gone too far. Gripping the handle of his sword tightly, he lunged towards his duplicate.



There was a flash of blue light and Richard heard the crackle of static electricity. The pretender before him started to shimmer. The neon landscape could be seen through the figure's outline. All around, the air seemed to take on a life of its own.

Deadly deception

Richard watched in complete amazement as his duplicate transformed itself into a giant metallic lizard, which turned towards him and hissed menacingly. "Allow me to introduccce myself. My name is Holotron. In me you have met your maker."

"I'm not afraid of you," Richard cried, waving his sword defiantly.

The creature laughed. It was a sound that sent a chill through Richard. With a flick of its enormous tail, Holotron sent him flying through the air. He landed on the neon floor and once more pointed his sword at Holotron.

"I'm developing quite a tasste for the Chossen One," it sneered at him.

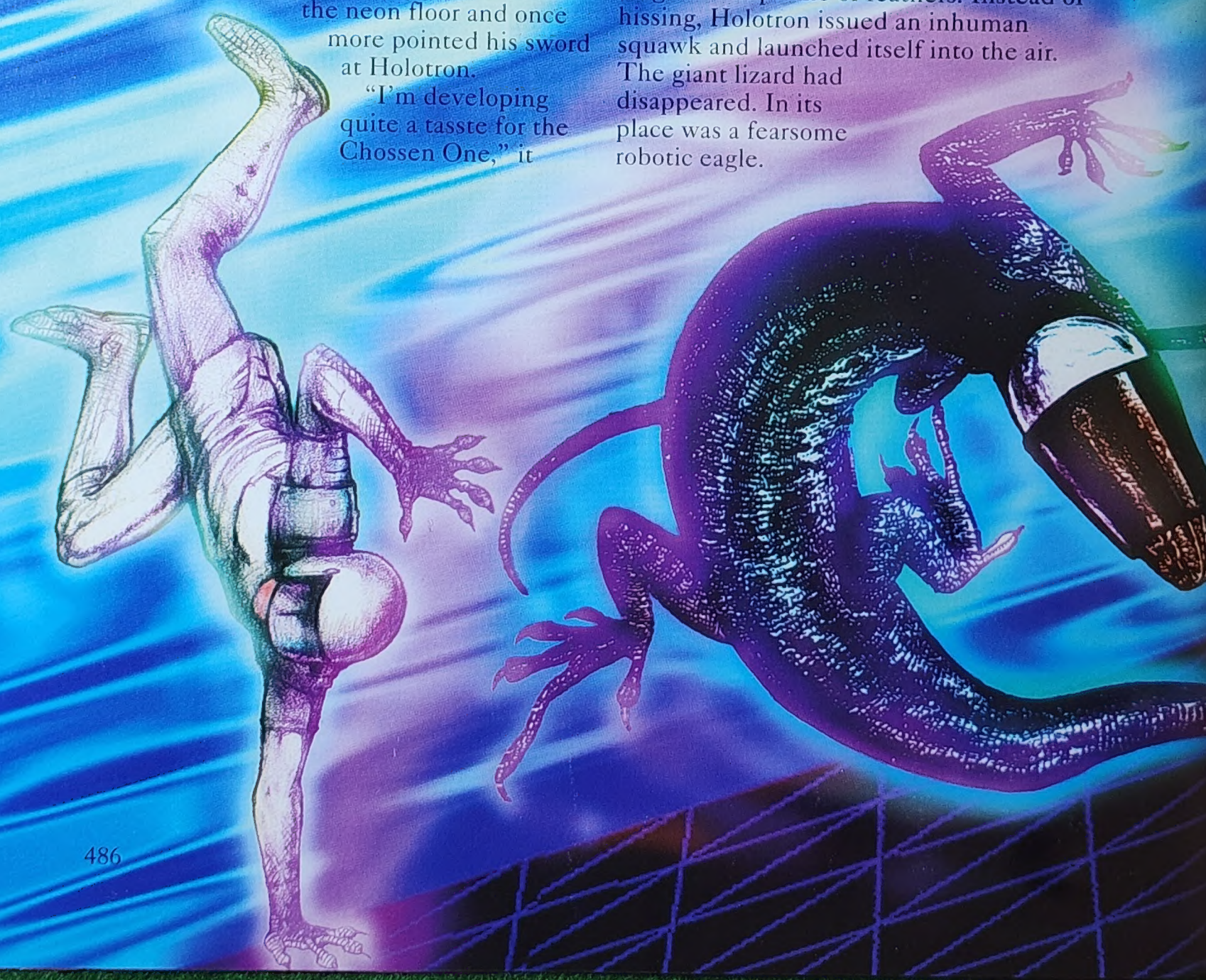
Richard jumped to his feet and ran. There was no way that he could defeat the gigantic lizard. His best hope was to get to the cyber cruiser and risk whatever perils awaited him in the skies.

He was not quick enough. With a giant leap, Holotron raced in front of him, blocking Richard's path to the machine.

"Not so fassst, Chósssen One – you'll misss all the fun." Holotron's words signalled the start of another transformation. Once more the air around the creature bubbled and grew murky.

In the claws of the eagle

Holotron roared as its features began to remould. The creature's arms grew in length and its claws flattened. Its tail fanned out and was replaced by a magnificent plume of feathers. Instead of hissing, Holotron issued an inhuman squawk and launched itself into the air. The giant lizard had disappeared. In its place was a fearsome robotic eagle.



Richard climbed aboard the cyber cruiser and started its engines. Behind him Holotron screeched and flapped its immense neon wings.

He pulled back the joystick and brought the cruiser up to maximum speed. At once, he felt the icy breath of the cyber winds in his face as the machine cut through the air.

Airborne Assault

It was soon clear that Holotron was playing with Richard. Despite its vast size, the creature had far superior mobility, and rode the cyber air currents with consummate ease.

Richard's efforts at avoiding the gigantic bird were futile. Holotron seemed to be enjoying demonstrating his avian prowess to his hapless victim. With a majestic sweep of his wings, Holotron cut a graceful arc through the air and circled the speeding cyber cruiser.

Richard looked around to see if there was any sign of Robo. If he could get a look at the robot's binary panel, perhaps there would be a pointer to how to defeat Holotron. However, his robotic companion was nowhere to be seen.

Then Richard noticed something. Although Holotron's head and body had changed into that of an eagle, its wings seemed somehow unfinished. Comprised of brightly-lit neon lines, they looked exactly like the strange, alien landscape below him.

"What if all of this is just an illusion?" Richard said, the beginnings of a plan forming in his mind.

With Holotron racing

around him, Richard slowed the cyber cruiser to an almost dead halt. It hovered silently in the sky.

"So, you want to fight!" scowled the giant eagle.

"No, actually I don't," Richard replied calmly. "I'm not going to fight because I know that you are nothing. You're not real."

The eagle's rage

A look of surprise spread over the eagle's face. Then it let out a terrifying roar which echoed around the neon hills below.

Richard stood his ground. "Scream and howl all you like," he smiled. "I know that there's nothing you can do to hurt me. You don't exist."

The eagle swooped below Richard and picked up a huge piece of neon rock. It climbed into the skies above Richard and then released the enormous boulder. The rock hurtled towards him.

Richard drew on all his powers of resolve. Despite the fact that he could feel his knees shaking as the neon rock came towards him, he held firm. The rock passed straight through him. It was not real. Holotron screamed in rage.

THE COWARD

Even though Richard's heart was pounding, he felt a tremendous sense of relief. His instincts had been right.

Before his eyes, Holotron was diminishing in size. Its plumage and proud beak shrivelled away to powdery dust.

"Please, Chosen One – let me live. I want to live." There were tears coming from the eagle's eyes as it spoke. "I was only playing. I wasn't going to hurt you. I'll be good in future. Please…"

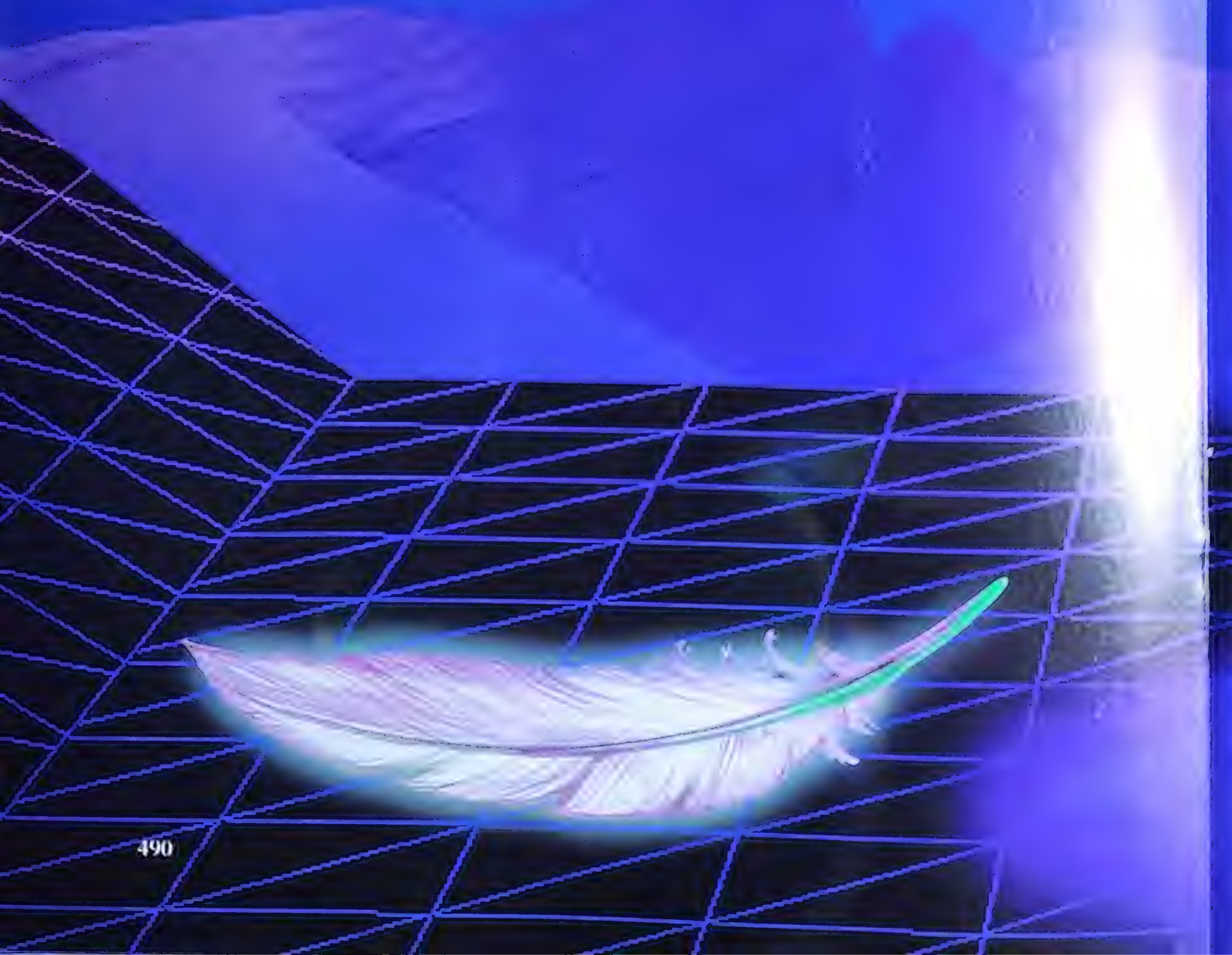
Richard felt a twinge of sympathy. "All right. I'll let you live. How do I do it?"

"Believe in me," pleaded the creature. "Please, believe in me…"

It was too late. With those final words, Holotron vanished. As Richard's adversary disappeared, a startling transformation could be seen on the cyber landscape.

Like melting snow, the neon grid lines dissolved away to reveal a beautiful purple world. Even the sky changed colour. The wisps of scarlet and purple, which had hung menacingly in the air evaporated, leaving a tranquil ribbon of blue.

Richard felt a strange feeling of comfort wash over him. Below him he heard a familiar robotic voice.



"Robo!" exclaimed Richard. "Where have you been?"
"Have been near to Chosen One throughout battle with Holotron. Creature made it impossible for you to see Robo."

The robot climbed aboard the cyber cruiser and once more the pair travelled the skies. It was a very long time before either of them spoke.

THE CYBER TOMB

The skies began to darken when Richard spotted something up ahead of them. They were approaching a vast range of mountains. As they drew closer Richard was amazed by their sheer size. They appeared to stretch up further than the eye could see. It was obvious that there was no way they would be able to fly over the giant obstacles.

"We must search for a way through," said Richard.

"Affirmative," replied Robo. "Mountains reach out into the cyber stratosphere."

They flew on, carefully avoiding the many razor-sharp peaks and hillocks that spiked towards them. Finally, Richard spotted something odd concealed about the rocky terrain.

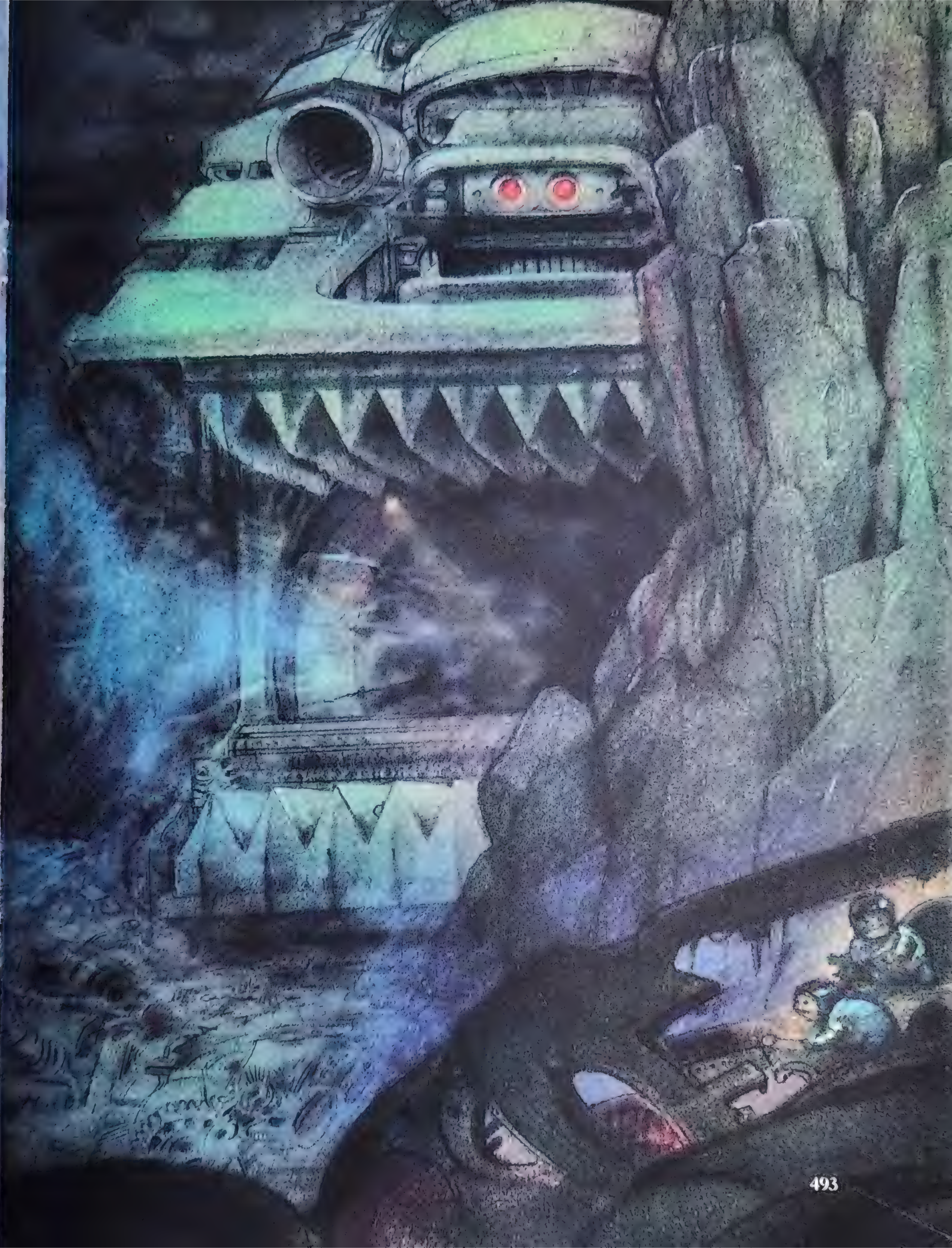
"Look," he said, pointing excitedly. "I can see a doorway!"

As they moved towards it, Richard could sense danger. It was clear that whoever constructed this deadly orifice had intended it to be some kind of warning.

Instead of doors, the entrance was lined with enormous jagged spikes. Scattered around the immediate vicinity were the mangled remains of a menagerie of robotic creatures. It was obvious that they had once tried to gain access to whatever was behind that immense entrance.

"Robo, I think we should perhaps look for another way through the mountains," Richard said.

"Affirmative," came the response.



Richard and Robo carefully retreated away from the giant, forbidding doorway.

"Whatever is inside that entrance is something I do not want to meet," Richard said.

Robo's internal circuits whirred into life. "Negative," the robot intoned. "Chosen One must gain entry into the hillside. Imperative."

"I beg you pardon!" Richard gasped.

"Inside is Omni piece. Richard must locate it."

"You've got to be kidding!"

IN THROUGH THE BACK DOOR

Richard landed the cyber cruiser and dismounted. Taking care not to trip over any of the metal fragments which covered the ground, he looked around for an immediate solution to his problem.

"Perhaps there is another way inside," he suggested.

Robo also climbed off the cruiser and swivelled his domed head left and right. The robot began to emit what Richard recognized as the sound of radar.

Eventually, the noise ceased. Robo turned to Richard. "Have located secret access point. We must proceed without the cyber cruiser."

The pair set off on foot and soon came to a small circular panel in the ground. It appeared to be made of some kind of metal. Richard watched as Robo fired his heat ray at the panel. It began to melt away.

When the metal had cooled, Richard peered though the hole that remained. He could see nothing but darkness.

"Hello!" Richard shouted into the hole. "Anyone there?" The only reply he could hear was the echo of his own words.

He was obviously standing at the entrance of a tunnel of some sort. It must be very deep.

"Enter tunnel," Robo commanded.

"Oh well," Richard shrugged. "In for a penny..." With Robo close behind him, he launched himself into the tunnel.

At once, Richard was immersed in darkness. He felt himself sliding downwards. The air around him was cold and clammy.

"If I was back on Earth I could probably learn to enjoy this," he said.

All at once, Richard and Robo's journey was over. They landed with a splash into a pool of icy cold liquid.

"Ugh!" Richard cried in disgust. "What is this stuff?"

ROBOT GRAVEYARD

Gradually, Richard's eyes became accustomed to the light which surrounded his landing spot. It was then he realized that all around him lay the severed limbs, heads and carcasses of a startling variety of different robots.

"Robo," he said, wrinkling up his nose, "We must have fallen into some kind of scrap-yard. It smells disgusting!"

Richard tried to walk. It was not easy – the stagnant, freezing cold liquid came right up to his armpits.

"We must find a way out of this place," Richard said, turning to Robo, who was almost completely immersed in the strange liquid.

CHAINSAW

Suddenly, Richard heard the sound of something approaching.

"Keep still!" he told Robo.

Into view stepped a small robot. Compared to the creatures that Richard had encountered during his incredible adventures in the Cyber Dimension, its appearance was unremarkable. With one notable exception.

Instead of arms, it had evil-looking diamond-tipped chainsaws. It obviously used them for cutting up robot components. It moved towards Robo.

SHOOMI'S SANCTUARY

Enter into the Cyber Dimension and engage optical recognition to find...

▶ Shoomi and Shoobi

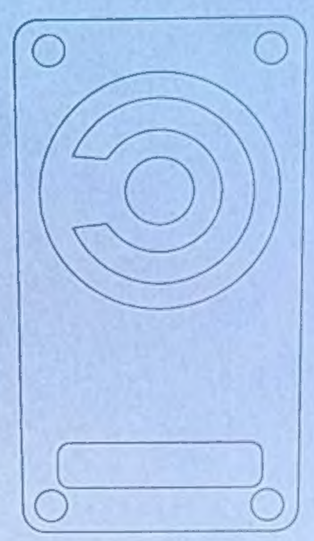
Richard and Robo's persistent followers are still hot on their trail. Hidden away somewhere in this issue are Shoomi and Shoobi. Can you use your powers of observation to find them?

In issue 30 Shoomi and Shoobi were on page 472.

▶ Computer Challenge

Another vitally important computer component from the sinister *Cyber Dimension* has been hidden in this issue. Help Richard and Robo locate it in less than three minutes.
When you have discovered the component's hiding place, can you guess what it is and what its function might be?

In last week's issue, the underside of a computer mouse was hidden in Mortex's underground citadel on page 472.
A computer mouse is an extension of a computer's keyboard. It enables the user to navigate freely around the computer screen and control computer programs.
Computer mouses come in all shapes and sizes. They are specially designed to be comfortable and easy to use.



▶ Binary Panel

In this week's issue, Richard did not have the opportunity to translate Robo's binary panel. Using your Binary Decoder, can you translate the message on page 480 and find out how the awesome Holotron was defeated?

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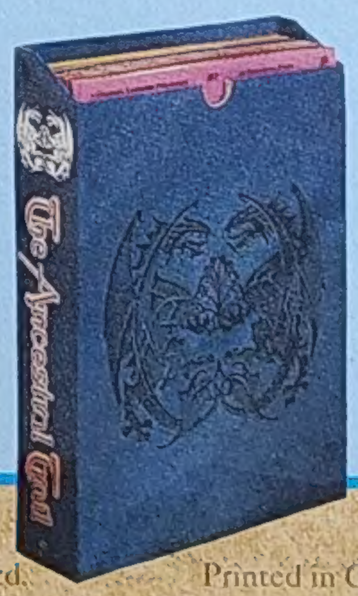

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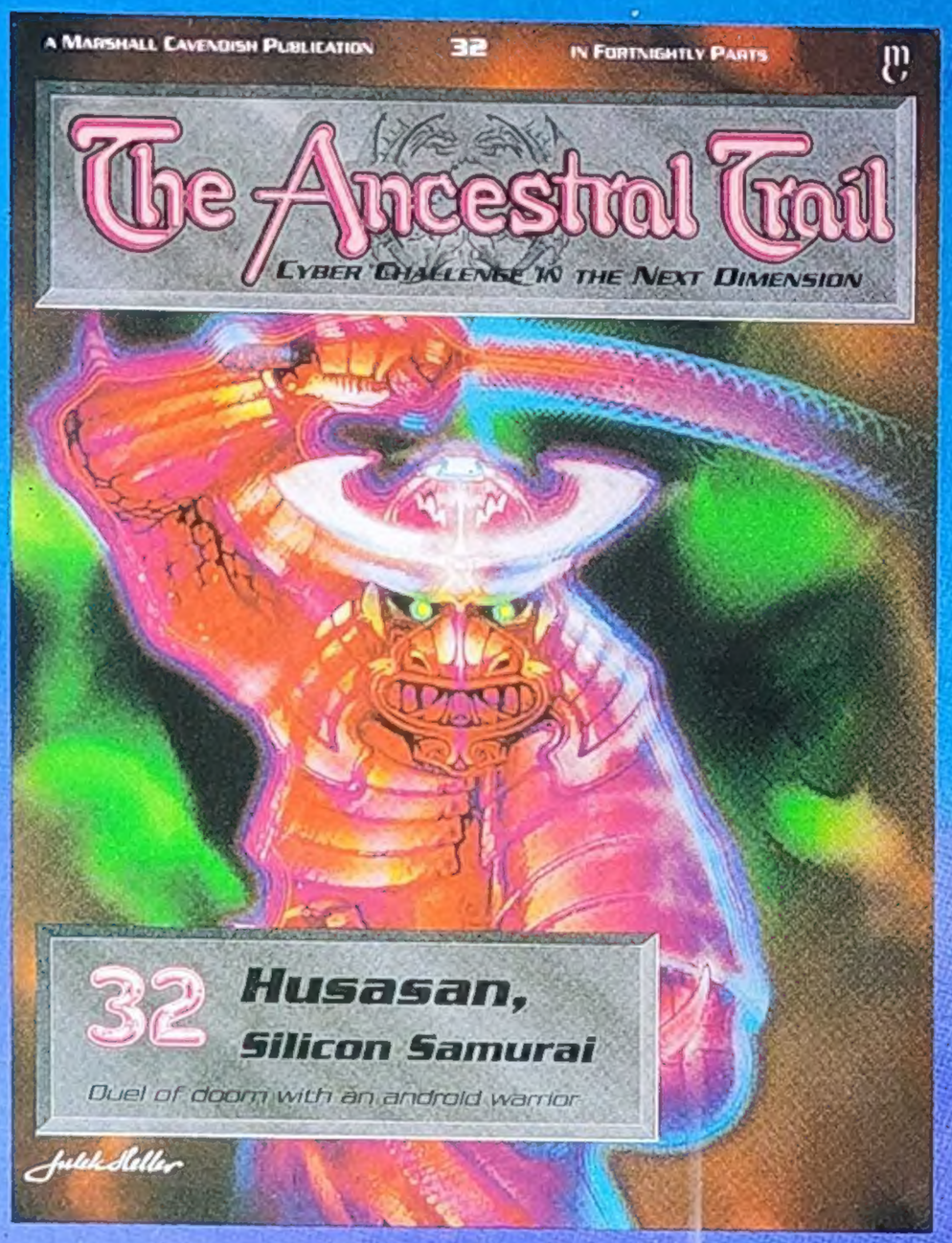

In Issue 32

Husasan, Silicon Samurai

Richard battles a robotic swordsman and enters a mysterious library, containing evil from another dimension.

plus

- Playing boards for your Mainframe Control and Cyber Chess strategy games

Coming in Issue 33

Terraforma, environmorpher

Richard enters the domain of the terrain transformer, a land where nothing is as it seems. With Robo at his side, Richard locates his first Omni piece.

plus

2 more **Techscan** cards ▶ 2 more **Cyber Power** cards ▶ More **Mainframe Control** playing pieces.

ISBN 0-7485-4215-9
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